

HWY-07-MH-007
Huntsville, AL

ATTACHMENT #7

**RECORD OF WITNESS INTERVIEW
TONY L. WILLIAMS**

(4 Pages)



NTSB

National Transportation Safety Board

490 L'Enfant Plaza, SW
Washington, DC 20594-0001
www.nts.gov

**RECORD OF INTERVIEW
TONY L. WILLIAMS**

DATE: November 24, 2006

LOCATION: Huntsville Police Department, North Precinct

PRESENT: Tony Lamar Williams, witness; NTSB Investigator Paula Sind-Prunier; Sgt. Ed Cain, Huntsville PD; Lowell Williams and Lorenda Boyd, witness's parents

The witness is a student at Lee High School, and attends classes at the Huntsville Center for Technology. His DOB is _____, and he resides at _____, Huntsville, AL. His home telephone number is _____. He had previously completed a written statement for the Huntsville Police Department.¹

At the time of the accident, the witness was driving an orange 1990 Toyota Celica GTX. He had one passenger, Jarrid Ross, who was seated in the front passenger seat.

According to the witness, after the bell rang at school, Jarrid asked if he could ride over to the Tech Center with the witness. He also wanted to stop by his mother's house to pick up a belt that he had left there. He said that he had planned to ask Jarrid to drive, but because Jarrid asked first, and he wanted to stop at his mother's, he agreed. He said that he usually doesn't drive, but has driven about ten times this year—most of the time he rides with someone else, either B.J. or Jarrid. He said that whoever has the most gas usually drives. He has only rode the bus about ten times this year. He told investigators that he doesn't like the bus because there are no seatbelts and the overpass makes him uncomfortable and he worried about crashes. When asked, he replied that he never talked to the school about his concerns. He noted that he is afraid of heights.

He said that they pulled up to the Oakwood intersection and the bus was there. He pulled up behind the bus and followed it from there. When the ramp split into two lanes, he got in the right lane because he thought it went south, but didn't realize that wasn't the case until he was already in the right lane. He felt a bump, and the car jiggled. He thought it was just a bump, and paid no further attention. As he saw the right lane went North, he had to get back in the left lane and was side-by-side with the bus at that point. He said he started to slow, felt the car shift, and tried to keep from hitting the wall on the right and the bus on the left, but he couldn't get the car under control. He struck the bus at its right front tire, then struck the left bridge wall and dragged against the wall and saw the bus go over the edge. When his car came to a rest, he tried

¹ Refer to the written statement for additional information.

to get out, but his door wouldn't open, so he climbed out the passenger side door. He called 911 but couldn't get through. He realized then that others were calling, too. An ambulance came and put a neck brace on him. He saw the bus driver on the ramp pavement.

He was driving a 1990 Toyota Celica that belonged to his grandmother. She had only had the car about a month or so, and he had been driving it exclusively for about 2-to-2-1/2 weeks. It was the only car he drives. He had previously driven his mother's 1993 Nissan Infinity, and before that, a Toyota Camry. He drives the car to his girlfriend's house, to school, to work, and back to school to pick up his sister. He works at the Taco Bell on University, near the Tuesday Morning store.

He stopped driving the Infinity because it needs new tires. The Infinity and the Camry were automatics, while the Celica has a 5-speed manual transmission. He learned to drive a manual transmission from Jarrod's father after he got the car about 2-to-2-1/2 weeks ago. He felt the Celica handled better than the Infinity. He said it rolled smoother than the Infinity, and he hadn't noticed any noises or odors from the Celica that gave him cause for concern. He had noticed a ticking sound when he turned to the left, but it didn't seem to affect the car. Jarrod and another friend were teaching him about cars, but he had little knowledge of vehicle mechanics otherwise. His seatbelt was on at the time of the crash, but he cannot recall whether Jarrod had fastened his seatbelt.

He obtained his driver's license on 2005. He held a driver's instruction permit before that, which he obtained after taking a computerized test of road rule knowledge. He had taken driver's education. His father thought that it was required, but his mother stated that it is only recommended in Alabama. He had to drive 6 months with the permit, before obtaining his license. He states that the permit restricted him to driving with a licensed adult; as far as he knows, there are no restrictions on his license, e.g., GDL. He does not wear eyeglasses or contacts. He plays football and runs track. He states that he was required to get a driver's pass to drive to the Tech Center. He had to see security and provide his name, license, and proof of insurance. He filled out the form; his parents didn't sign anything. He doesn't recall any passenger restrictions. There are "drivers" and "riders" passes; he stated that he doesn't have a pass. He states that they do not take attendance on the bus. He spends 3rd and 4th periods at the Tech Center. The bus was taking the same route it usually takes, and he had taken the same route he normally takes up to the point of the accident.

The "bump" that he said he felt when he was driving felt like running over the reflective markers in the pavement. He said the wheel jiggled a little bit. He couldn't tell the direction of the bump.

He states that he wasn't trying to pass the bus. He thought he needed to go right. He believes he was traveling about 45-50 mph. He braked when he lost control. He had never had that sensation before in any car he'd ever driven before. He panicked, and believes he sped up a bit. He said that the steering wheel stayed in his hand, but it wiggled, and he had no control of the vehicle. He's never had a flat tire while driving before. When asked if he thought he might have blown a tire,² and if so, which one, he stated, "one of the ones on the right."

² In his written statement to the Huntsville PD, he stated that he believes he might have blown a tire.

He said that when he lost control of the car, it felt like the car was pulling to the right. Braking made it feel as though the car wanted to go to the left. He believes he might have been in third gear at the time, but is unsure. He doesn't recall what gear he was in for sure. He states that he had not shifted gears anything during the sequence. He tried to keep his car straight.

He said that there is no checking of driving passes at the Tech Center, and that a lot of the students drive without the appropriate pass. He estimates that about 65% of the students ride the bus, and the rest drive or ride with a driver.

The Nissan Infinity that he had driven previously was driven exclusively by him, although it was registered in his mother's name. His grandmother bought the Celica so that he could learn to drive a manual transmission. He thinks he might have hit the gas instead of the brake after the wheel started shaking. He said the "bump" he felt occurred about the time he changed lanes.